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AUTHOR King, Martha L.
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ABSTRACT

Focusing on language development--from beginning speech to literacy--with particular attention paid to growth in writing, this paper identifies and describes: (1) links between speech and writing; and (2) features of children's written and spoken texts that indicate growth. The process of constructing "texts" is presented as the fabric of all discourse where connections between speech and writing and reading and writing can best be seen, and the process is traced through an overview of children's language development from the infant's initial contact with speech to the early primary grades when children produce written texts. By highlighting key concepts of language and learning such as intersubjectivity, intertextuality, and the constructive function of language, the study shows how literacy can naturally evolve from language. Examples of early reading, and story telling and writing are presented and analyzed as they illustrate development in terms of story structure, cohesive elements and social/cultural contexts. (NH)

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A READING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER REPORT

Technical Report No. 414

SPEECH TO WRITING: CHILDREN'S GROWTH IN WRITING POTENTIAL

Martha L. King

Ohio State University

January 1988

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820

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Abstract

This paper considers pervasive strands in language development from speech to literacy with particular attention to writing. It draws upon studies of early writing development at Ohio State University that identified and described (a) links between speech and writing and (b) particular features in children's written and spoken texts that indicate growth. The focus is on *text* and the constitutive function of language. Examples of early reading, story retelling and writing illustrate development in terms of story structure, cohesive elements and social/cultural contexts.

SPEECH TO WRITING: CHILDREN'S GROWTH IN WRITING POTENTIAL

The great debate in literacy learning now centers about writing as well as reading, raising questions about 'connections' between the two and surely opening the way for new or revised theories about how literacy is learned and used in the everyday world. Great strides have been made in understanding crucial aspects of these two forms of language. Significant insights have come from studies in the following strands of research: (a) early learning or 'emergent' literacy, (b) the reading and writing processes, (c) the cognitive demands of the tasks, (d) the structural features of various forms of written discourse, and (e) the cultural and historical uses of both oral and written language.

The focus of this paper is on language development--from speech to literacy with particular attention to growth in writing. My work, which grew out of research with colleagues at Ohio State University[1], has been concerned with identifying and describing (a) links between speech and writing and (b) the particular features of children's written and spoken texts that indicate growth. What is it young writers must learn to *do* in order to make the transition from speech to writing, and then to extend their competence beyond the few sentences they write in the early years in school? While the main focus has been the relationship between speech and writing, reading and listening became integral parts of the research because our subjects were asked to write *stories* and to retell traditional tales. All of the modes are language; therefore, insight into one--speech, for example--should aid the understanding of another.

Oral Language Bases for Literacy

Once reading and writing are viewed as language, it is clear that understanding their relationship will necessarily involve assumptions about language learning and language *use*. Both skills are simply different modes for representing meaning within the larger system of language which is manifested first in speech. While each mode (channel) has its own conventions, all are subject to particular constraints that operate within the system as a whole. This holistic view of language, where particular rules and relationships can be expected to govern reading and writing, as well as speech and listening, allows one to make predictions about, and investigate aspects of the learning process across the four modes of the linguistic system (King, 1978). Reading and writing are more than new sets of skills learned in school; they are a continuation of a process of language learning already well established in speech. Literacy, as Vygotsky (1978) has explained, develops as a part of "a unified historical line" from speech through play and drawing to reading and writing. Reading and writing differ from speech in regard to the functions they serve and the symbol systems involved. Reading and writing use a second order--visual--symbol system that has its origin in speech and other first order symbols such as drawing and play (Vygotsky, 1978). It is in these early modes of representation that children begin fulfilling a basic human need: to transform experience into various forms of symbolic representation (Langer, 1942, 1968, pp. 41-43).

Learning Language is Social

Children learn to use language to fulfill personal needs within their own families and cultures (Cazden, 1983; Wells, 1981). Infants' first contact with speech is associated with the multiplicity of actions that comprise the care and attention given by their parents and other caretakers. The way language is used differs among and within cultures and families; but all at least provide sufficient demonstrations of talk for young children to form a system of language and its uses. Babies very early begin to make distinctions about the significant people, objects, events, and talk that surround them. Bruner (1975) points to the rituals and play of bath and feeding times, for example, as the ontogenesis of speech acts. The distinct routines, gestures and intonation "draws the child's attention to the communication itself and to the structure of the acts in which communication is taking place" (p. 10). Both Bruner and Wells (1986) emphasize mother/child interaction and joint attention to common interests as crucial factors in learning oral language, and Halliday (1975) concludes from his

research that the mother actually participates in the child's construction of a system of language and meaning.

On the other hand, recent research has indicated that childrearing practices and language learning vary substantially among cultures and families within cultures. Heath (1983) describes a community in which children from birth are a part of the social life of an extended family. They are seen as able to learn what they need and require in that social context. The baby is constantly with adults and instead of talking *to* the child, the childtender talks *about* the child to other adults. Surely, her intonation, body responses and other aspects of the situation draw attention to particular actions and utterances that are repeated. The infant is constantly around when accounts of events are given and toddlers follow the talk, pick up and repeat bits and later repeat them with variation. Boys are exposed to teasing and language games of older boys and men in which there is a great deal of repetition, elaboration and attention to audience response. Girls recreate bits of adult dialogue in their play and in talk with their own reflections in mirrors.

Despite diversity in language use, children during the second and third years learn to take part in some form of extended discourse. It may be in dialogues with parents, as Wells (1986) has reported, or in pretend conversations in play and in monologues, as Heath (1983) has documented. They also develop a sense of what can be shared in talk as well as actions and what will engage the attention of an intended audience. This sensitivity to a topic and to the intentions of an audience is a basic aspect of communication, the *I/Thou/It/*--or Speaker, Listener, Subject relationship that operates across all forms of discourse.

During the second year, talk increasingly becomes important in communication with others and a significant part of children's play. Talk gets others' attention, can be used to tell about oneself, and accompanies play. Talk, then, is more than an accompaniment to play; it both mediates and extends the actions as do other tools and objects of symbolic play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning to construct an oral text. Talk in the preschool years, in which there is an effort to understand others and to be understood, is essential to children's learning the adult linguistic system. In such situations, where meanings are shared or negotiated with participants in the communication, children learn to construct an oral *text*. That is, they learn in a supportive situation to produce language of more than a single sentence that forms a unified whole (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 1).

Halliday (1975) claims that dialogue is an important part of children's language growth at this time because it requires attention to words out of immediate context and a search for appropriate grammatical forms to express meanings. These are necessary skills in the adult system where language serves three *integrated* superordinate functions: *Ideational*, language used for thinking, organizing and expressing ideas; *Interpersonal*, language resources for interacting with others, and in various ways expressing self; and *Textual*, language resources (words, sentences and other language options) for creating texts to express meanings intended by the speaker to a particular audience. These three functions provide the language resources needed to construct words, sentences, and texts that make sense within themselves and within a particular context-of-situation (Halliday, 1973; 1975). Function is no longer simply equated with use as was the case in the child's linguistic system built during the first year or so; instead, a typical utterance includes both interpersonal and ideational components.

Language learning is rapid at this time. Talk increasingly carries meaning between children and others. It is often ancillary to the action. The focus of attention is on *what* is being said, not *how* the utterance is structured; but the routines, repetition and intonation call attention to the language itself. The process is facilitated when the child's own intentions come into play, and meanings are not imposed from one person to another but are shared.

A vital part of *what* children are learning to do is to construct *texts*, the fabric of all discourse and the place where connections between speech and writing or reading and writing can best be made. While there are aspects of reading and writing that are not texts--names, labels, lists, signs and the like--one cannot become a reader or writer, or sustain a conversation without the ability to construct and reconstruct texts that are meaningful within a given situation. As children's worlds expand to include people and experiences beyond the home, they must use language more explicitly--to tell about experiences not shared with their audience. In nursery school and kindergarten, children may be expected to listen to stories read or told, and to share experiences with a group of children, all of which require ability to respond to, or produce a *sustained* text. For various reasons some children are better prepared for these expectations than others (Heath, 1983).

Moving Into Literacy

Most, if not all, children growing up in a modern society, where they watch television, go to restaurants and accompany adults shopping, have experience with written language. They see writing used in signs, labels, names, grocery lists and notes written to family members. All are very practical uses of writing and largely dependent for meaning on the environment in which they exist. This highly *contextualized* writing, especially when it is part of an action ("Yes, that says STOP;" or "Now, help me find the Cheerios"), enables children to make inferences about both the functions of writing and the relationships between visual symbols and speech sounds (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

But literacy requires experience with another kind of written language, where meanings are independent of the situation and environment in which they occur. In such *decontextualized* writing, meanings are made explicit within resources of the language itself, through syntactical and lexical features, and the conventions of a particular form of discourse. While the function of some kinds of writing is to facilitate or accompany an activity (a shopping list), in other kinds (e.g., stories) the written language dominates or constitutes the activity itself. The resources of language make it possible to represent the properties of any situation within the text alone. Such texts are marked by conventions or regularities that are embedded in the culture, re-occur over time, and are expressed in language that becomes invariably associated with each activity. Texts are understood because ". . . behind every text are other texts, not simply by way of specific references but also in the way it is constructed, how it transforms other texts, pillages them, echoes them--in a phrase, how it *belongs* (Rosen, n.d.)."

Every story presupposes the existence of others; threads and connections of many different kinds exist and tie a story to other narratives and other verbal acts, forming what narratologists call *intertextuality* (Genette, 1980). Roland Barthes, a French narratologist, claims ". . . narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the history of mankind and nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (1977, p. 79). It is these predictable conventions of reference, structure, symbols that shape and convey a sense that a text is a story and make it predictable and comprehensible.

When children participate frequently in particular forms of discourse (TV commercials) or enjoy repeated encounters with a favorite nursery rhyme or story, they are able to abstract a frame--a reference or a conceptual perspective--that guides their expectations and interpretations of similar texts in the future. For stories, they develop schemes, internal conceptual structures or sense of story (Applebee, 1977) that represent their understanding of such texts. Several scholars have argued that stories become represented in memory as dynamic schemata, or schemes (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). There is some evidence in their descriptions of common events, such as eating at McDonalds, that four- and five-year-old children rely heavily on such schematic organization (Nelson, 1978), suggesting a gradual acquisition of a story schema for firsthand experience beginning with script-like chronicles. Wells (1986) contends that infants construct a mental model of their world based on the regularity of experience, which later helps them to make sense of their linguistic

experiences. By reference to this model, they construct mental stories about their own behavior, birds eating berries, or Mummy preparing dinner. In this way, he says, "stories are woven into the tapestries of the child's inner representations, producing patterns that give it significance (p. 200).

Parents often help children make links between the personal stories of their own world and those in books, when they read and enjoy stories and books together. The following example[2] of Mother and a 2 1/2-year-old Emily sharing *Rosie's Walk* shows how in these early interactions children become actively involved in constructing a text around a book.

[Insert Example 1 about here.]

Notice in the example that there are actually two texts--the author's text composed of pictures and writing by Pat Hutchins, and the one built by the mother and child in the process of sharing the picture book. In the example, Hutchins' text is shown in uppercase, picture information is in parentheses and Mother/Child talk is in lowercase. In most dialogues involving children at this age, talk accompanies playing a game or making something where language is subsidiary to the actions; but here, language is central--constituting the text, with the author/illustrator, a third participant.

As they share the picture books, Mother and child interpret the pictures and elaborate the text. Here are key features:

> They take turns, and Mother structures the exchange and keeps the focus on the text.
>
> Emily enjoys the pictures as is shown in her pleasant "ummms" as each page is turned and with her mother's help she integrates the pictures and words to make a unified text.
>
> After the first pages, Emily seems to have learned the routine and initiates her own response, "Trying to catch 'em," followed by "He fell in the flour."
>
> This is an unusual text of one sentence containing a string of prepositional phrases, and with the story carried more in illustrations than in words. The words tell only of Rosie's walk; but the mother-child dialogue includes the actions of the pictured fox.
>
> The mother's questions and comments direct the child's attention to the fox, to his villainous intentions and resulting doom.
>
> Emily joins the author as she brings forward the story of the fox and emphasizes his actions--BANGED his nose, gonna SPLASH, JUMPED over, LANDED in the wagon, FELL in the flour, WENT home. Pat Hutchins' words attend to places--the *haystack, mill, pond, fence, beehive*.
>
> The mother mediates the text for Emily by extending Hutchins' prepositional phrases and at times filling in as narrator: "Rosie just kept on walking."
>
> She encourages anticipation and prediction, a basic skill in all reading (Smith, 1979). Her collaboration in the task enables Emily to develop reading skill in the way that Polanyi (1967) says all skills develop--with one's focal attention on the outcome of the global task. Emily takes control at the end: "Wham--the fox went home."

> The very instant *Rosie's Walk* is finished, Emily begs for "More," for "This One," and Mother asks, "Which one? This one? *Goodnight Owl*?" Then in a more formal 'reading tone,' begins: "*Goodnight Owl* by Pat Hutchins. This one's by Pat Hutchins, too. She wrote *Rosie's Walk*."
>
> And Emily replies, "She wrote it by Pat Hutchins!"

So the cycle is repeated. Emily is learning to engage actively in the reading process and, at the same time, to be aware of a third participant in their talk--the author not only of *Rosie's Walk* but of other favorite books as well. She is learning to attend to the *ideational* meanings of the text derived from her interactions with her mother and the unseen author and text.

Henrietta Dombey (1983) studied the story-centered dialogue between mother and her three-year-old daughter in terms of several linguistic and interactive features of the process that serve as 'opening moves' for later involvement in reading. She attended to the layers of meaning that become apparent to the child as she and her mother together shared the text. She then made distinctions between book and non-book centered conversations on the basis of meaning construction. Noting that in conversation children can take advantage of various aspects of the physical environment, she states:

> But when they learn to read they have to learn to ignore such sources of information as irrelevant . . . [and] learn to construct information from the interplay between the printed text, the pictures and those instances of common experiences which literary convention dictate the author has a right to invoke in the reader. This means paying close attention to the words on the page. (p. 40)

It is clear that both Emily and Dombey's child were learning essential aspects of becoming a reader. With parents acting as mediators, they were establishing a transactional relationship with a written text in which a reciprocal relationship between author and reader was assumed.

Composing Texts by Retelling Stories

In early experiences with stories children build up a sense of what constitutes a particular form of discourse which contributes to their developing expectations and text-forming strategies. Retelling stories they have heard gives children the opportunity to produce sustained discourse within a frame of reference that is likely to be understood by their listeners. Both Moffett (1968) and Britton (1970) argue that sustained discourse makes an important contribution to writing and that children take a first step toward it when they take over a conversation and maintain a topic independent of the feedback they ordinarily get in conversation.

Retelling stories provides a supportive link between speech and writing because there is a ready-made content, previously experienced in language. This task differs substantially from the requirements of telling or giving an *account* where first-hand experience must be organized and then coded in speech. Both story telling and retelling require that tellers make meanings clear by references made within the text itself rather than through shared situational factors that often support other forms of spoken language. At the same time they must draw upon their linguistic resources at both the syntatic and semantic levels, as well as their knowledge of story structure and conventions, to form a text that is appropriate for their listeners. The texture of discourse, as Halliday (1975) has explained, "depends not only on structuring the parts in an appropriate way and joining them together, but on doing so in a way that relates to context--as narrative, dialogue, or whatever generic mode is needed (p. 111)."

Analyzing Story Retellings

Children's retellings have been analyzed as a means of understanding how stories are represented in memory and related concepts develop over time. This research indicates that children recall stories in prototypic form: setting, initial event, reaction/response, attempt/outcome, final event--even when stories have been deliberately rearranged with events out of order. The research suggests that traditional tales have conventionalized structures that can serve children in remembering and producing original stories (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). They serve, not as templates to copy, though there is obviously some imitation, but as a basis for determining necessary and sufficient elements to include.

Gardner (1982) and associates in Project Zero found that when a key element of a story is omitted, older children fill it in. They asked children to retell a story (written for research purposes) in which character motivation was omitted for half the subjects but fully included for the other half. They found that first- and third-graders, even when motivations are clearly included, have difficulty understanding certain relationships between characters, their goals and why they behave as they do. By sixth grade, however, subjects can supply motivation, handle syntax, and construct an adequate story. Those who hear a version of the story without motivation, actually include a good deal related to character actions. The longer the time between hearing and retelling the story, the more motivation is added.

Analyzing Stories Written or Dictated by Children

Elements of traditional stories are represented not only in story retellings but also in original stories that children write and tell. Botvin and Sutton-Smith (1977) observed that many of their subjects tell fantasy narratiaves resembling the structure of fairy tales as analyzed by Propp (1968). Applebee (1977) reported that stock characters such as witches and fairies appear in 6-year-old children's stories, although less than half have firm concepts about the behavior of such characters. By age 9, however, the majority (86%) have clear expectations for witches, lions, wolves and so forth (Applebee, 1977).

Much of this research on story structure and children's acquisition of its form and concepts was conducted within Western mainstream cultures and reflects the kinds of experiences and types of stories children typically have. Recently researchers (Brewer, 1985; Cazden, 1983; Heath, 1983) have called attention to the differences among cultures and ethnic groups in both child rearing practices (i.e., in sharing stories) and in the kinds of stories indigenous to those groups. All agree, however, that the experience of hearing the written language of stories read aloud and retelling them is highly important to all children as they move toward literacy.

An example from first graders in the Ohio State study of speech-to-writing illustrates the tie between story retelling and story writing. One aspect of that research measured children's growth in story retelling, another their competence in dictating stories and a third, their growth in story writing, from mid-first grade through Grade 2 (King, et al., 1981, 1982). In that study 36 children were asked to listen to picturebook editions of folktales, and then retell them immediately afterward to a 'naive' listener ("a visiting teacher who likes stories"). They were also invited to dictate and to write stories.

The story retellings of first grade children varied greatly in length from 3 to 69 T-units (Hunt, 1965) with the mean at 16.50. The structure of the retellings, determined on the basis of Propp's (1968) identification of fixed elements, differed too in terms of the *type* and *number* of elements or functions included, and the *order* in which they occurred. The children's retelling texts contained roughly twice as many functions and function types as the stories they dictated and about four times as many functions and function types as those they wrote. The number of function types used in their retellings increased significantly from first to the end of second grade, even though the retold stories contained an equal number of function types (see King, et al., 1981). Retellings that were similar in

length (T-units) and structure (as determined by functions types) differed substantially in other text-forming strategies children used as is shown in the examples that follow. Hillary's retelling[3] of *Squawk to the Moon, Little Goose* (Preston, 1974) was one of the two longest in the collection. Excerpts from the other, by Bill, are given for comparisons.

[Insert Example 2 about here.]

As a storyteller, Hillary opens with a traditional story beginning, "Once upon a time . . ." even though the story as written by Edna Preston began directly with the first event: "Mrs. Goose put all of her goslings to bed." Bill too begins with a traditional way, but quickly changes stance to address the story listener directly (lines 2-5). Both refer to the main character (Little Goose) as "Little Duck"; however, Bill pauses to explain that the story is about goslings.

[Insert Example 3 about here.]

Bill's entire story contains more T-units and words than Hillary's, but her T-units are longer--10.5 vs. Bill's 7.3. Much of the difference in complexity is due to the way each child handled dialogue. Hillary embeds the dialogue within the frame of the story and throughout makes clear who is speaking--except for lines 32 ("No, no, no") and 33 where she confuses pronoun gender. Bill, on the other hand, relies on voice change to indicate who is speaking. The sentences are short and require the listener to infer each speaker's identity.

Hillary's text is more explicit in several ways. She uses proportionally more specific nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and fewer pronouns to make her story clear and cohesive. Both children use a range of conjunctions, the temporal *then*, the causal *so* and the adversative *but*, about equally. However, Bill uses *well* extensively, both in his role as narrator and in the speech of his characters.

Hillary's text clearly retells the story. It is cohesive and coherent, and it shows her ability to assemble her language resources at both the discourse and the semantic and syntactic levels to reconstruct a text she had heard in a way that relates to the context of story telling, that is, as narrative, not dialogue. The development of this text-forming skill is most apparent in the written stories which she produced also as a part of the Ohio State Study.

Analyzing Stories Written by Children

Stories that children produced were defined, not as personal narratives (although some were), but as texts that are similar to the traditional stories young children typically hear at home and are a part of their early school experience. Stories were so defined because we wanted to relate children's retelling competence to their writing. We limited the field to story in order to get texts that were similar in (a) structure, (b) the purpose for which they were told or written, and (c) in the role of language in that form of discourse. In both the retelling and written modes language functioned primarily as constitutive to the discourse, rather than ancillary as is the case in much of children's speech.

Cohesion and coherence. Story retelling differs from conversation in several ways but especially in respect to the relationships among the participants: story writing differs from retelling in regards to the medium of communication, as well as in respect to the relationships between the participants. Writers must create story content and structure for readers not present. To be meaningful, the text must have unity, which, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), is achieved through *cohesion* or the kinds of *semantic relations* that occur when one element of a discourse presupposes another in the text because its meaning is tied to that word, phrase or clause. For example,

> Abby wanted to walk on the rainbow.
>
> But *she* couldn't find *one* anyplace.

She in this short text is interpretable only through the referent *Abby*, and *one* through *rainbow*. *She* and *Abby* represent one type of reference *tie* while *one* functions as a *substitution* for *rainbow*. Reference and substitution are two forms of cohesive ties; others include use of illipses, conjunctions and lexical ties. The latter refers to the way cohesion is achieved through the choice of words; for example, through *reiteration* (Some people talk and talk . . . Some people laugh and laugh); *synonyms* and near synonyms (glides, soars, sails); *antonyms* (heat of summer/cold of winter); superordinates or *hyponyms* (mice, snakes, deer/animals) and part-whole relationships or *meronyms* (animals with claws and paws, hooves and snapping jaws). These semantic relationships convey meaning because they are based in language-wide supra-textual bonds founded in experience. Generally, any two lexical items that tend to appear in similar contexts (fish and chips/hamburgers and fries) generate a cohesive force (Hason, 1980).

Children very quickly learn to make their stories cohesive and to form meaning relationships within the text itself. Our studies at Ohio State, of written and dictated texts in Grades 1 and 2, show that children first rely heavily on pronoun reference (using *I, my, his, they, it*), and to a lesser degree on specific words or lexical cohesion. But from first to second grade the proportional use of pronoun reference declines and there is a sharp increase in semantic relationships formed by words or lexical cohesion.

These two classes of cohesion (reference and lexical ties) form separate chains of meaning, according to Halliday and Hasan, and make a major contribution to the overall *coherence* of a piece. Those formed through reference ties are labeled *Identity Chains* (which refer to the same person, place, or thing); and those formed through lexical cohesion, *Similarity Chains* (which belong to the same *semantic field*). Our studies show that initially identity relations take precedence over similarity links; but by mid-second grade, children expand the range and extent of the similarity relations they make. This development can be observed in three of Hillary's stories written in first, second and third grades.

In February of first grade Hillary wrote *The Silly Tadpole* story on two pieces of paper folded to make a four-page book. Her school experience prior to this time had placed writing as an activity that occurred as a follow-up to some special event. The words children might need to describe this event were first generated in talk and then listed on charts for children to use in their writing.

Hillary's story (Example 4) demonstrates considerable competence. It includes a formal beginning, a main character (whose thoughts or goals are revealed), an initial event with a complication, and a final event that promises equilibrium in the end.

[Insert Example 4 about here.]

In this brief text of six sentences, Hillary forms four identity chains (of reference) by using *personal pronouns* (he, they) and *demonstratives* (*the* mom, *the* watertower)--plus two chains of similarity as represented by *repetition* (sea/sea) and a weak *meronomy* chain (watertower/water/sea).

The next text (Example 5) written in November of second grade is much longer than the first and contains a greater number of identity and similarity relationships. In addition to using personal pronouns and demonstratives, Hilary now employs possessives and manages a full range of similarity relations. *Reiteration* (up, up; down, down) is most frequently used; but she also uses *opposites* (start, stop; little, big); part-whole relations, *meronomy* (room, house); and words that belong to the *semantic* field (e.g., sound and bubble gum--pop, bubble and blow). One gets the impression in this text that Hillary is simply playing with words--with contrast, similarity and repetition--while indulging in a bit of fantasy. It is a story to please herself, and any other interested reader who might encounter it, especially members of her class.

[Insert Example 5 about here.]

Ellen and the Magic Dragon, written in the spring of Grade 3 (Example 6), illustrates how an increasing variety and number of elements in Hillary's language repertoire combine to make a text that tells an interesting story and also is cohesive. Chains of reference and similarity relations are expanded in both frequency and type and the proportion of semantic to reference chains increases as the writer structures the meaning relationships.

[Insert Example 6 about here.]

Ellen and Peanut of course make up the longest identity chains, but *reference* is also established through other elements (e.g., wolves, kingdom, and day/Wednesday). As the story builds, Hillary plays across a wide range of *similarity* relations, using reiteration most extensively (live, live; brown, brown; walked, walked; sleep, sleep); but near synonyms too (go/walk, said/screamed; carry/pick up; saw/appear; kid/11-year-old); and *antonyms* (sleep/wake, get-tired/rest); part-whole relations or *meronyms* (house/ceilings; hair/eyes); and *hyponyms* (trees/forest; morning/Wednesday; eat/peanut butter and jelly sandwiches).

Structuring Meaning in Stories

The meaning potential that children demonstrate in writing arises from many sources within the writers themselves. Thus far, this paper has focused on how their knowledge of language enables them not only to form sentences or express meanings in graphic form, but to select and weave together words in ways that fulfill their particular purposes and make meanings explicit within the text itself.

A second source of knowing is drawn from experience with texts themselves. All speakers and writers, whatever their communicative purposes, rely on their knowledge of differences in text structures--stories, rhymes, TV commercials, cartoons, and explanations. From these experiences, they intuitively and then sometimes consciously learn the form and conventions that belong to a particular genre. It is this second source that I turn to for another way to analyze children's stories.

Story structure. Hasan (1984) contends that in all forms of discourse some elements must occur, are *obligatory*; and other elements, while interesting, elaborative or supporting, are *optional*. Stories for children, she claims, must have three elements: an initiating event (IE) which must contain a particular character, a sequent event (SE), normally recursive, and a final event (FE). Such stories may also have a setting, which Hasan calls *placement*, a *finale* or formal ending, and a *moral*. The placement, if it occurs, will either precede the initiating event or become a part of it.

Hillary's story, *The Silly Tadpole*, has two of the obligatory elements of a story: an *Initial Event* (One day the water . . .) and a *Final Event* (They took it to the sea). There is also the optional *Placement* or setting and, if one considers pictures to be part of the story, there is a Finale with the Tadpole happily swimming about with his friends in the sea. What is missing of course is the middle Sequent Event(s).

The Magic Dragon story is much more fully developed as is shown particularly in the Placement, for which Hillary writes 10 sentences, arresting the story development until line 11. There is a *particular* character, Ellen; both *temporal distance* (. . . a far away kingdom) and impersonalization (Ellen, a smart 11-year-old) are established. The story definitely occurs in non-real time.

With the nuclear aspects of the opening set, Hillary elaborates by giving information that is optional, but important in this story. She creates expectations by providing details about the habits and attitudes of both Ellen and Peanut, although attitudes are more implied than explicit. "The dragon *habitually* ate peanuts; he and Ellen *habitually* walked; he *habitually* carried her home, implying a

careful *attitude* toward his friend. Many children as they are finding their way into writing stories give this same kind of attention to the beginnings, setting the stage for action. Sometimes so much effort is spent at this juncture that they are unable to fully develop the middle and the ends of their stories. From the perspective of Hasan's 'structure of the tale,' this story has in addition to the elaborate Placement, an Initial event (line 11), five Sequent Events (lines 16-17; 22-23; 24; 25-26; 27-28), a Final Event (line 29) and a Finale (line 30). Hillary's text is coherent, not simply because she has interrelated chains of reference of similarity, but because it has the *obligatory* elements of a story for children as recognized in our culture. More elaborate story structures have been proposed by several narratologists since Propp, but the simplicity of Hasan's schema makes it especially useful in observing the development of children's stories.

The Narrative Codes

Beyond the aspects of coherence and basic elements of plots, meanings in stories derive from various other codes that are historically part of the culture and known through previous experiences with a variety of discourses. Barthes (1974) maintains that everything in a narrative functions--signifies, but at different levels. In the ideal text, he says, the networks are many and interact without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; the text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of the signified. Children bring to writing their knowlege of the world--what things are and do, how humans and non-humans behave, how people feel and believe--all of which, inform the text. Knowing about peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and the pleasures of walking in the forest were important aspects of Hillary's story. If we examine Hillary's last text, we can see that she assumes with other storytellers shared cultural knowledge and draws on common stereotypes:

> She was an everyday kind of kid
>
> The dragon ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches like any patient, kind animal or human would do.

When she wakes, "something was missing"--a shared cultural knowledge of what it means 'to be without' invites readers to share this feeling of loss. It both conjures up sympathy and helps to create suspense in regard to what is to come.

Hillary shows awareness of her reader when early in the story she begins to build up expectations. She uses contrast as well as other literary devices to create suspense and mystery:

> She was an everyday kind of kid, "except for one thing"
>
> she had a dragon
>
> peanut was sick and couldn't go with her
>
> she walked and walked
>
> but there was something missing
>
> soon she was asleep

Hillary not only exploits the established codes and conventions of the genre to weave her tale; she violates the code as well. She gives the wolves in the story a conventional role, but the dragon becomes a kind and friendly Dragon rather than a typical fire-producing one.

In her role as narrator, Hillary assumes different communicative functions as she seeks to establish and maintain contact with her audience while shaping the story events into an appealing narrative

(Genette, 1980). While her main attention is on the relationship between the events of the story and the whole structure she is constructing, she *directs* attention and sets the stage for action in a long introduction. She *communicates* directly with the audience about the time sequence of the story: ". . . that was Wednesday, the same day," and *explains* how a dragon could possibly live in a house.

Throughout, Hillary demonstrates that she can write a story with well-defined characters and related events that are located in the familiar world of trees and forest. It is one with everyday kind of kids, but where fantastic events occur. She can weave the events into a text that is coherent, that has a structure and other conventions that make it recognizable as a story.

Conclusions

Children are highly competent language learners whose entry into literacy can be traced to earlier developments in speech. My intention was to show how children's language develops over time, in predictable ways that signal later accomplishments. Literacy can naturally evolve from speech when children have a need to read and write and sufficient demonstrations from literate adults about how literacy functions for them in life. By highlighting some key concepts of language and learning, such as *intersubjectivity, intertextuality* and the *constitutive function* of language, I wanted to draw attention to their pervasiveness in all language use throughout life. The focus on *text* was of course to emphasize that any piece of meaningful language, spoken or written is cohesive, has structure and draws on cultural connections. These are the places where connections between the four modes of language can best be made.

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Footnotes

[1]Three studies, supported in part by grants from the National Institute of Education, are reported in:

King, M., Rentel, V., Pappas, C., Pettigrew, B., & Zutell, J. (1981). *How children learn to write: A longitudinal study* (Ed. Rep. No. 213 050). Columbus, OH.

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[2]This example was contributed by Mary K. Holt, Emily's mother.

[3]Examples 2-6 are from the King and Rentel studies listed in footnote 1.

Example 1

Mo. *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins

Em. Pat Hutchins

Mo. ROSIE THE HEN WENT FOR A WALK

ACROSS THE YARD

What's happening? (Picture: Fox jumping toward a rake.)

Em. What's the fox doing?

Em. He's trying to catch Rosie. (Picture: Fox jumping toward a rake.)

Mo. Do you think he's going to catch her?

Em. No.

(Picture: Fox hit by rake.)

Mo. What happened?

Em. He banged his nose.

AROUND THE POND

Em. Whm - m

Mo. What will happen next?

Em. He's gonna splash!

(Picture: Fox falling in pond.)

Mo. OVER THE HAYSTACK

Em. Whm - m

Mo. What happened?

(Picture: Fox covered by hay)

Em. He fell in a 'stick' of hay.

Mo. And Rosie kept right on walking

she walked

PAST THE MILL

Example 1 (Continued)

There's the fox

Em. Trying to catch 'er,

Mo. Think he's going to do it?

Em. No

(Picture: Fox covered with flour)

Em. He fell into the flour.

Mo. And Rosie just kept right on walking

she walked

THROUGH THE FENCE

Em. The fox jumped over

(Picture: Fox jumps over the fence into a wagon)

Mo. And what happened?

Em. What?

Mo. What happened to the fox?

Em. What?

Where did he land?

Em. He landed in the wagon.

Mo. UNDER THE BEE HIVE

(Picture: Fox running away; bees chasing)

Em. Here--Wham! The fox went home.

Mo. and Rosie got home in time for dinner

AND GOT BACK IN TIME FOR DINNER

Example 2

Hillary Retelling *Squawk to the Moon, Little Goose*

1. Once upon a time there were four little ducks and their mother.
2. And the mother duck went to visit someone.
3. And she left the little ducks all alone.
4. And the littlest duck was a bad little duck.
5. So he went down to swim at the pond when his mother said to stay home.
6. And up in the sky was a cloud shaped like a fox.
7. And he thought the fox was real.
8. And it was gonna swallow the moon.
9. So the moon went behind the cloud-like-a-fox.
10. And the little duckling thought that the fox had swallowed the moon.
11. So the little duckling went up to tell the farmer.
12. And by the time he had gotten there and talked to the farmer, the farmer said, "Oh, then what's that up there in the sky?"
13. And the farmer pointed.
14. And the duckling hadn't looked up in the sky.
15. And there was the moon, big and round and right there.
16. So the duckling went down with her head held downward so she didn't have to see the moon.
17. But when she went there, when she got to the pond again, she saw the moon in the water.
18. It was only a reflection.
19. But *she* thought that the moon had fallen into the water.
20. Then she ran up to tell the farmer.
21. And the farmer said, "Stupid duckling, can't a man get any sleep?"
22. And, he said, "But farmer, the moon has fallen into the water."
23. And then the farmer said, "Then what's that up in the sky?"
24. And there was the moon, big and yellow and right there.
25. So the duckling went back to the pond with his head faced up so she could see the moon.
26. But while she was walking a fox caught her and took her down in the weeds.
27. And then he said, "Oh, now I'm going to eat you."
28. But the duckling said, "Please don't eat me."
29. And the fox said, "Well, will you give me juicy chicken meat?"
30. And she said, "No, no, no."
31. And then he said, "A duck?"
32. "No, no, no."
33. He said, "I'll give you a cheese as big as the moon."
34. So, the little duckling went down to the pond.
35. And the reflection on the water made it look like there was a cheese there.
36. And the fox hadn't bothered to look up.
37. so he said, "You don't have a cheese as big as the moon."
38. And then said, "Then what's that down in the water?"
39. And he said, "A cheese as big as the moon."
40. And then he said, "I'm gonna eat up that cheese."
41. And he dives in the water.
42. Splash!
43. And the duckling ran home.
44. And he got a spanking for going out.
45. So the mother tucked him in again.

Example 3

Excerpts from Bill's retelling of *Squawk to the Moon, Little Goose*

1. Well, once upon a time there was three ducklings.
2. Well, I'm telling the story about the ducklings.
3. But they were goslings.
4. And they had a mother--like every other gosling would.
5. And I don't know where their father was.
6. And their mother went out on a trip.

.
.
.
.

(Little Goose appeals to farmer a second time)

27. She went back to the farmer's house and squawked out in the farmer's garden.
28. "All right, what is it now?"
29. And the duck said, "The fox ate the moon!"
30. What the fox ate up the moon--again?"
31. [No, wait a minute.]
32. [I'm mistaken.] (To listener)
33. "The moon fell down in the water and down at the bottom of the sea."
34. "Could you get it?"
35. "Well . . . just a minute."

.
.
.
.
.

(Little Goose bargains with the Fox)

48. And she asked, "Give me a nice goose to eat?"
49. "No, No,"
50. "I'll eat you."
51. "How about a nice chicken?"
52. "No."
53. "Then I'll eat you."
54. "How bout a cheese as big as the moon?"
55. "Well . . . OK."
56. "Where is it?"
57 "It's down in the water."
58. "Well . . . OK."
59. "I'll try to get it."
60. Splash!

.
.
.
.

61. And they lived happily ever after.
62. The moral to the story is, never get out of bed without your mother letting you.

Example 4

The Silly Tadpole

1. once there was a tadpole who lived in a watertower
2. and he thought that the watertower was the sea
3. one day water started to drain out
4. and he landed in a little boy's bathtub
5. the mom was cleaning the bathtub
6. and they took it to the sea

Example 5

1. once there was little girl
2. and she had a horse that could fly
3. one day she was on her horse
4. and someone said "U. F. O."
5. and she said to the horse "up up"
6. and the horse went up
7. they saw someone
8. and the horse started flying
9. ((speaker:?))
10. the horse stopped
11. it threw something
12. on up up and up they went
13. down down
14. oh there is the house
15. down down
16. when they got down the girl said "oh mommy I have been up up up and down down down
17. ((speaker: mom)) "no no you didn't go up up nor down down down
18. ((speaker: girl)) "yes I did"
19. ((speaker: mom)) "well you are going up up up to your room now"
20. but when she got to her room she got some gum and blew a big bubble and floated out of her room and down on the horse
21. pop!
22. it popped on the horse
23. but the horse chewed it off
24. and they were happy

Example 6

Ellen and Her Magic Dragon

1. Once in a far away kingdom surrounded by trees there lived Ellen.
2. Ellen was a smart 11-year-old with brown eyes and brown hair.
3. She was one of those everyday kids except for one thing.
4. She had a dragon.
5. The dragon's name was Peanut because the only thing he would eat was peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.
6. He always protected Ellen and got her out of any trouble she was in.
7. He lived in the house across from Ellen's house.
8. They had to break all the ceilings through so he could sit down.
9. One of their favorite things to do was to take a walk around in the forest around the kingdom.
10. When Ellen got tired of walking, Peanut would put Ellen on his back and carry her home.
11. One day Peanut was sick.
12. And that was Wednesday.
13. "Darn," said Ellen because this was the day they go walking.
14. "Oh well," said Ellen.
15. "I guess I'll just go by myself."
16. It was a bright sunny morning when Ellen started walking.
17. She walked and walked.
18. But there was something missing.
19. She missed Peanut.
20. Soon she got tired.
21. But there was no one to carry her home.
22. So she decided to rest awhile.
23. Soon she was asleep.
24. When she was sleeping a pack of wolves crowded around her.

Example 6 (Continued)

25. Soon she woke up and saw the wolves.

26. She screamed!

28. He picked up all the wolves and blew them all away.

29. Then picked up Ellen and they went back to the kingdom.

30. He was awarded with all the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches he could eat.